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ABSTRACT

In the Philippines, where speech communication as a field of study is barely emerging from the traditional treatment of speech as an art to speech as a behavior, researchers are faced with the problems of adopting or adapting theories and research methodology developed in another culture and/or developing a strictly generic theory, research methodology, and measuring instruments. This paper explores the applicability in the Philippine setting of a theoretical framework, and research methodology and instruments developed in and previously applied in the United States and England regarding the relationship between speaking ability and the home variables of socio-economic status, home environment, and family composition. The results of the study show a significant correlation between socio-economic status and speaking ability and between home environment and speaking ability. These results support the findings of similar studies in the United States and England and, therefore, indicate that a theoretical framework may be used with some generality beyond the limits of a Western culture. However, the obverse findings regarding the effect of family composition on speaking ability may also be an indication that some cultural variations permeate the factors affecting speaking ability. (Author)

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A CORRELATION BETWEEN SPEAKING ABILITY AND CERTAIN HOME VARIABLES: A COMPARISON OF RESEARCH IN TWO CULTURES

Alejandro J. Casambre and Josefina Angeles-Agravante

In the Philippines, speech communication, as a field of study, is barely emerging from the traditional treatment of speech as an art to speech as a behavior. At this stage, it is imperative to look into the problems of adopting or adapting theories and research methodology developed in another culture and/or developing a strictly generic theory, research methodology, and measuring instruments. Needless to say, the resolution of these problems is crucial to the development of any field of study in any particular culture.

This paper explores the local applicability of a theoretical framework and research methodology developed in and previously applied to a foreign culture. A problem of this kind becomes even more significant when we realize the close relationship between communication and culture.

As Alfred Smith writes in his book, Communication and Culture (31):

> In modern society different people communicate in different ways, as do people in different societies around the world; and the way people communicate is the way they live. It is their culture.

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He goes on to say:

> Within a given culture, communication has many complex effects. When communication takes place between two cultures, these effects are even more complex. When messages are transported across cultural boundaries, they are encoded in one context and decoded in another.

Hall, in his books, The Hidden Dimension (13) and The Silent Language (14), cites specific illustrations to show how signals are interpreted differently from one culture to another.

On the other hand, Murdock presents the other side of the coin. According to him, "all human cultures, despite their diversity, have fundamentally a great deal in common." On this basis, he justifies the validity of the cross-cultural survey (29).

How do these two points of view affect the peculiar condition of the Philippines with regards to its cultural background?

A Filipino who looks at his own culture asserts that the Philippines and the United States are literally worlds apart. According to Dagot, the half-century of colonization may have shaped the political direction of the country but the national character of the Filipino has evolved its own native patterns. He observes that the close Philippine-American ties are confined to external manifestations such as architecture, fashion, popular music, etc., and one who is more observant is apt to find "an inner, truer layer of native traditions existing behind these facades" (8).

An Occidental, however, observes that in the Philippines, "...the Spanish Catholics, in their long reign, did indeed imprint a Western culture; it was altered in many ways but also strongly reinforced by a fresh and vigorous injection of American values,.."

The same source further observes that "...Filipinos are more like Americans than Asians - yet by race and ancient contacts part of the Malay world; the Philippines represents a nation in search of a personality... there is a wish to be Asian, not American - and yet a pride in American democracy, modernity, economic vigour. There is a proud Spanish tradition and Catholic obedience - and a secular, egalitarian, nationalist youth" (16).

In the face of these ambivalent observations on the nature of culture, and more specifically, on the cultural orientation of the Philippines, the researchers raise the question of whether a theoretical framework and research methodology based on a Western model would be applicable or not in a Philippine setting; and should they be inapplicable, to identify specific problem situations that necessitate adaptations.

To explore the abovementioned problem, a study that looked into the correlation between speaking ability and certain home variables in the Philippines (1) is used as a case in point.

In the United States and England, studies show that among the variables that affect speaking ability are: 1) the socio-economic status, 2) the home environment, and 3) the family composition.

In these studies, the socio-economic variable categories are defined in terms of those that cut across social classes and spell out similar ideas, values, feelings, attitudes, and behavior that characterize the members of a particular class. These same categories delineate differences in social behavior between classes. A review of literature shows an apparently strong positive influence of socio-economic status on an individual's speaking ability (17, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 32, 33). The absence of

any study with results that are contrary to this finding is an assertion of the formidable effect of this particular variable on speaking ability.

To measure class position, a number of studies used Hollingshead's Index of Social Position. This measuring instrument listed residence, occupation, and educational attainment of head of household as the components of the variable (15). Although the descriptive categories for occupation and educational attainment are applicable to the Philippine situation, and were, therefore, retained as indices of class position in this local study, the descriptive categories for residence obviously do not apply to the types of residences in the Philippines. In place of residence, therefore, the researchers used family income since it was deemed as another accurate gauge of economic status.

Western studies also show that the more favorable the environment in the home is, the better speaker the individual becomes (2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 17, 18, 24, 26). The studies that dealt with home environment made use of different measuring instruments. One of the instruments, the Myers Intrafamily Questionnaire, was chosen by the researchers since the items in general appeared to be the most applicable to a Philippine situation (17). To further ascertain the clarity and applicability of the items in this particular questionnaire, a pre-test on a comparable group of subjects was conducted. A counter-check was made by asking randomly-selected faculty members of the University of the Philippines to evaluate the items. The selection of faculty members was based on their perceived expertise on the subject of home environment. Hence, the faculty members selected were from the College of Arts & Sciences (Departments of Speech and Drama, Sociology, and Anthropology), the College of Home Economics, the Institute of Social Work and Community Development, and the University Elementary

School. Except for a few items that were perceived either as unclear or inapplicable, the rest of the questionnaire was retained.

The third variable, family composition, pertains to the strictly objective aspects of size, ordinal position of the children in the family, and the age relationship among the children. The studies on this variable conducted in the United States show that a large family is a handicap to verbal development because children learn to use language more effectively from an adult model. With regards to the ordinal position of the children in the family, the results of studies have been found to be contradictory. There are studies that show that the children who are exposed more consistently to adult speech models tend to pick up better speech skills. There are other studies, however, that show that being the cynosure of adult attention has a retarding effect on language and speech development. The same results are found in studies on age spacing between children. Such similarity in results of studies dealing with the variables of ordinal position and age spacing may be attributed to the fact that the eldest and the youngest children separated from their siblings by five or more years may be considered, psychologically, as only children in many respects. Likewise, middle children separated from their siblings by five or more years may be considered, psychologically, similar to the eldest and youngest children.

For this variable, the categories used in the Western studies were adopted. The ordinal positions in the family were categorized as: 1) eldest, 2) intermediate between the eldest and the middle child, 3) middle child, 4) intermediate between the middle child and the youngest, and 5) the youngest. Age spacing was described according to the following categories: 1) five years or more, 2) four years, 3) three years, 4) two years, and 5) one year. However,

since the average size of the Filipino family is generally larger than that of an American family, the descriptive categories for family size were extended to include nine or more children.

With the previously discussed adaptations, the study on the correlation between speaking ability and selected home variables, was conducted. The subjects consisted of 129 students in six sections of the basic course in speech at the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of the Philippines. The mean age for the group was 18.25. There were slightly more females than males (55% vs. 45%). Although the majority of the subjects were sophomores in college (52%), there were also freshmen in the group (6%), juniors (27%), and seniors (15%). Ninety per cent of the subjects were enrolled for science courses, only 16% were enrolled for arts courses. More than half of the subjects were residents of the Greater Manila area, 17% came from cities outside of Manila, 17% came from smaller towns, and 4% were from barrios.

The speaking ability of the subjects was evaluated when they delivered their diagnostic speeches during the first week of classes. A panel of qualified and experienced judges did the evaluation. The subjects were also asked to answer the questionnaires as adapted.

The Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation was used to determine the relationship between speaking ability and each of the variables of socio-economic status, home environment, and family composition.

The following were the results of the study:

1. There was a positive correlation between speaking ability and socio-economic status. The coefficient of correlation was .43, which was significant at the .01 level.

2. There was a positive correlation between speaking ability and home environment. The coefficient of correlation was .25, which was significant at the .01 level.

3. There was a positive correlation between speaking ability and family composition but the degree of relationship at .022 was not significant.

The significant correlation value between socio-economic status and speaking ability, and that between home environment and speaking ability, are supportive of the findings of similar studies conducted in the United States and England.

What is interesting to note in this study, however, ia the very low correlation value between family composition and speaking ability. This result negates the findings of a number of studies conducted abroad.

Based on the results obtained in this study, it may be concluded that it is possible to adapt or adopt a theoretical framework, research methodology, and certain measuring instruments for speech communication that have been developed in and previously applied to a Western culture.

The similarity of findings regarding the effect of socio-economic status and home environment on speaking ability is significant in the light of the more recent interest in cross-cultural communication research. It is a proof that the theoretical framework may be used with some generality beyond the limits of the Western culture.

However, there is also an indication that some cultural variations permeate the factors affecting speaking ability. This is manifested in this particular case by obverse findings regarding the effect of family composition on speaking ability.

The difference may be attributed to the idiosyncracies that characterize the Filipino family as compared to its Western counterparts. The studies conducted by the Institute of Philippine Culture consistently point to the family as the most important element in the personality development of the Filipino and in his day-to-day behavior as an adult.

And an outstanding influence of the family is the emotional closeness and security that it fosters among family members. In the TAT stories of ninety Manila workers, Bulatao (11) identified three major themes; each theme reiterated the idea that a person finds security and fulfillment by keeping close family ties. This kind of orientation is said to have helped foster a mutual reliance among family members for support and approval. As a child, the Filipino learns that little acts of dependence please rather than irritate his elders. He grows up with the knowledge that dependency is always positively reinforced, while independence is negatively reinforced to the extent that the individual is made to feel anxious when left alone (12). The family set-up in the Philippines, therefore, throws the children closer together and encourages interaction. This is in direct contrast to an independent-oriented society as that of the West where the child learns to care for himself, to make his own decisions, and to set out on his own when he reaches the age of maturity.

Since the basic difference in this particular study concerns family composition, it would be useful to evolve a theoretical model that is based on a better understanding of the Filipino family. The model would be used to determine what type of family composition would best contribute to the making of an effective speaker. For example, in contrast to the American set-up, would belonging to a larger family in the Philippines be a contributing factor to better speaking? Since the children in the Filipino family are by nature close to each other, and draw from each other's knowledge and experiences, is it possible for the children to acquire and develop basically the same skills regardless of the ordinal position they occupy in the family? Answers to these questions, when found, would contribute to a better understanding of the

Filipino as a speaker. And if cross-cultural communication research is indeed essentially one of hypothesis testing and exploratory theory building, then, this study is an attempt towards the realization of that goal.

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